

## Introduction

It has been acknowledged that ‘staff expertise is the most important asset in a university; without it literally nothing can be achieved’ (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003: 23), yet the continuing professional development (CPD) of academics can be seen to take place within a complex array of competing challenges and perspectives. The nature of the academic role and the responsibilities attributed to it are changing, along with the relationships to other roles both within and without the institution (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003). Added to this there are new national policy standards, requirements and budgetary barriers/drivers that may impact upon the institution and its members in different ways. The ways in which these factors, in a complex and changing context, might influence the behaviours and attitudes of academic staff towards CPD has been unclear. This chapter reports on qualitative data collected as one element of a larger research project that set out to increase understanding of influences on the CPD practices of academics. By first exploring some of the pertinent debates in the literature and following this with the experiences and practice of academics, as reflected in the research data, the chapter provides evidence of significantly contrasting perspectives on the issues. Through this research, three interconnected areas of potential tension and debate are highlighted: issues related to the definition and meaning attributed to CPD; differences in the form and approach to what constitutes CPD activity; and policy implementation.

It has been argued that ‘top down institutional and quality agendas shape the context for much CPD’ (Clegg 2003b: 42). In contrast however, the current research is underpinned by the view that to develop a meaningful understanding of CPD practices in academia it is necessary to start with an exploration of what academics understand by CPD, what they do, and why, taking account of the context within which it happens:

it is equally ... important for the continuance of the university as we know it that we look systematically and critically at our own professional behaviour, at our structures of university self-governance, at our processes for peer review and at our underlying academic beliefs. (Dill 2005: 178)

These academic beliefs with regard to CPD have been little researched, hence the value of this project. To ascertain perceptions, qualitative interviews with a range of academics and managers were undertaken during the academic year 2007–8, within one ‘new’ English university – that is, an institution granted university status since the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. A total of 16 academics from across the institution were interviewed; the range of demographic profiles is given in Table 6.1. Five key informants were also interviewed: managers, staff directly involved in the professional development of academic staff and those who have responsibility for the enhancement of teaching and learning in the institution. With regard to the interviews with academics, a theoretical sampling approach was developed to reflect the aims and purposes of the research, ensuring the participation of those ‘who might know’ and enabling ‘a cross-fertilization between these different interpretative currents’ (Pawson and Tilley 1997: 160–1).

### Political and academic debates

The research was both timely and pertinent, given the context of change in higher education and current debates about CPD within this context. In 1997 the United Kingdom government commissioned a study of higher education, to report with 'recommendations on how the purposes, shape, structure, size and funding of higher education ... should develop ... over the next 20 years' (NCIHE 1997: 3). This report, known as the Dearing Report after its chairman, continues to be influential today. However, its recommendations have been criticized for proposing 'a series of uneasy compromises between market forces, state control and professional interests' (Tapper and Salter 1998: 33) in the higher education sector. Further evidence of managerialism in the context of higher education can be found in the more recent government White Paper *The Future of Higher Education* wherein, among a rhetoric of more freedom and self-determination for universities, examples are apparent of a furthering of the new managerialist discourse of 'recognition and reward'; 'quality and standards systems'; competition; and economic efficiency (DfES 2003: 50–51). Within this, despite the breadth and complexity of the academic role, this White Paper develops a focus on the enhancement of teaching. Illustrative of these approaches is the increasing focus on '... good-quality teaching for everyone ...' by '... staff that are trained to teach and continue to develop professionally ...' (DfES 2003: 49). Accordingly, the Higher Education Academy (HEA), which was created following the publication of the White Paper, developed the United Kingdom Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning in higher education (HEA 2006), hereafter referred to as the Professional Standards Framework. These standards aim to act as 'an enabling mechanism to support the professional development of staff engaged in supporting learning' with the underpinning areas of activity including the 'evaluation of practice and continuing professional development' and the professional value of a 'commitment to continuing professional development and evaluation of practice' (HEA 2006). To support the implementation of these standards, the Academy has developed a non-mandatory individual professional recognition scheme and, more recently, an accreditation process for CPD frameworks within institutions.

Despite these drivers, the concept of CPD in academia is problematic, with further ambiguity arising from a range of alternative terms, which may have similar meanings, being in use in different settings at different times (Blackwell and Blackmore 2003a). In her theoretical meta-analysis of CPD in higher education, Clegg argues that 'the problem of CPD ... of professionals in higher education is that it operates around a series of unresolved tensions' and goes on to describe 'fault lines in conceptualising' CPD (Clegg 2003b: 37). Notwithstanding an increasing focus on the CPD of academics, the Higher Education Academy's website, [www.heacademy.ac.uk](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk), does not include a definition of the concept. However, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) defines CPD as being 'a combination of approaches, ideas and techniques that will help you manage your own learning and growth' ([www.cipd.co.uk](http://www.cipd.co.uk)). Clegg (2003) argues that there are two 'dualisms' in respect of what is considered appropriate content and focus of CPD in higher education which reflect characteristic influences on academic identity. These are the research-teaching nexus and the tension between loyalties to the subject discipline and the organization.

There has been much written about the first of these, focusing on the differential status and importance afforded to research and teaching within universities (Barnett 2005c) leading to the emergence of 'two academic tribes – those who prioritize research ... and those who tend to

prioritize teaching' (Ramsden 1998, cited in Trigwell and Shale 2004: 523). This has consequent implications for the interpretation and impetus of CPD in the institution: strategically driven, formal development activities are commonly focused on teaching and learning, while activity that develops research and subject related skills and knowledge is not so readily framed as CPD (Clegg 2003b). This is potentially further complicated by the Professional Standards Framework (HEA 2006). Traditionally academics were seen to engage in teaching, research and administration, however, the reality is that the 'academic role is in flux' (Blackmore and Blackwell 2003: 19) and can include a wider range of tasks and responsibilities. The Professional Standards Framework can be seen to have a focus on teaching and learning and may not, therefore, enable academics and institutions to take a more inclusive approach to considering CPD.

The second of Clegg's dualisms refers to a perceived tension between the potentially competing approaches and needs of the discipline and the institution. It has been argued that some academics may only give credence to, and prioritize, development opportunities created and offered from within their own discipline, where they may have the most interest and confidence, as opposed to enhancing their skills and knowledge in teaching (Allan et al. 2003; Zuber-Skerritt 1992). To understand influences on CPD at individual and institutional levels it is necessary to take account of these debates, along with the significantly varied approaches that different academic disciplines have to CPD (Clegg 2003b). These differences can be seen as evolving from epistemological sources with academics being positioned within many systems or communities, each of which may have different discourses, approaches to teaching and learning, understandings of CPD and priorities. In addition to inconsistencies related to the meanings attributed to CPD there is clear variance about the appropriate form and approach to CPD activity. The core of the issue can be seen to pivot on whether or not CPD activity is inclusive of formal and informal approaches to learning in the workplace.

Taking the metaphor of an iceberg, Knight (2006) argues that there is more tacit, contextual, situated knowledge below the surface, than there is formal, tangible and explicit knowledge above it, yet there is 'a tendency to regard professional or staff development as comprising only those sorts of activities that are formally recognised' (Clegg 2003b: 37). However, it is argued that the dichotomous distinction between formal and informal workplace learning is not helpful, as workplace learning is, in reality, an 'engagement in goal-directed activities that are structured by workplace experiences' (Billett 2002: 58). It is, however, important to consider the influence and expectations arising from the contemporary culture of higher education, where there is a perceived '...shift in the focus of higher education from a collegial to a managerial model' (D'Andrea and Gosling 2005: 18). It can be seen, for example, that both the Professional Standards Framework (HEA 2006) and institutional audit requirements may increase the value of professional development that is synonymous with formal approaches, such as accredited courses and training events. Consequently there is concern that requirements and regulations can result in CPD being 'accountancy-driven' and as such, development that cannot be scrutinized, evidenced and 'counted' will not be valued (Schuller and Field 2002). McWilliam (2002) adds to the voices of concern in raising disquiet about the standardization of professional development in a context that is valued for its ability to question and challenge. In a similar vein, Karran considers professional development within the context of academic freedom within Chapter 2 of this book. The complexity of 'measurability' and demands for evidence are seen to result in only two

opposing potential solutions: high levels of trust, or strong regulation (Field 2002). Similarly Cullingford (2002) argues that mistrust is an insidious theme of current accountability agendas. Realistically, this may be a debate that has yet to fully surface in higher education. For example, the recently established process of HEA accreditation of institutional CPD frameworks could be seen to represent a process of devolution that supports institutional autonomy, or it could be argued that the perceived need for accreditation represents, in itself, reducing levels of trust.

A further area of potential tension and debate centres on the relationship between policy, implementation, institutional and individual interests. In a critique of broader lifelong learning policies, Field (2002: 201) conveys concern about the effectiveness of policy implementation, describing disparity between 'policy rhetoric and policy achievement' and 'conception and delivery'. With regard to CPD in academia, this may be partially explained by the apparent lack of consensus on the meaning and scope of the concept, which was discussed earlier. The CIPD definition cited earlier appears to focus on the individual, yet the literature shows that CPD in academia is increasingly led and informed by strategic objectives, managerial and institutional agendas (Clegg 2003b; Blackmore and Blackwell, 2003). Thus 'the core tension in this relationship is that between those needs for the continuity of the work practice and individuals' needs to realise their personal or vocational goals' (Billett 2002: 56). Conversely, Zuber-Skerritt suggests that this relationship is situated in mutually influential social processes, in that: 'To change people means to create a different climate for generating different working relationships. Changed people are the result of changed climates, and changed climates are the results of changed people' (Zuber-Skerritt 1992: 158).

With regard to the institutional context of CPD, it can be seen that there are competing views about whose goals and needs should be the focus of relevant strategies. Citing the work of Land (2001), Clegg (2003: 38) develops a distinction between 'domesticating tendencies' and 'critique', where the former aims to align CPD to the needs of the institution, and the latter has a more 'emancipatory purpose'. While overtly favouring critique and indicating concern about processes of CDP being 'enmeshed with the reform quality agenda', Clegg concedes that institutional agendas can be more inclusive and less discriminatory than forms of professional development that centre around exclusive networking (Clegg 2003b: 45). Blackwell and Blackmore (2003b) take this further and argue that the emphasis of any CPD strategy should be on institutional and departmental alignment and away from a focus on individual academics. However, despite some acknowledgement in the literature of the strengths of institutionally-led approaches, alternative approaches are advocated. For example, it is suggested that while professional development is a strategic activity, it is located in 'distributed activity systems' ensuring alignment to context within collaborative working environments (Knight 2006). Taking this further, Clegg develops the concept of 'making the academic department the hub of activities' (Knight and Trowler 2001, cited in Clegg 2003b: 47). However, there is some broad agreement in the literature that suggests that this debate, in reality, centres on a false dichotomy with both the institution and the individual potentially gaining from development activities to differing extents (Zuber-Skerritt 1992; Clegg 2003b; Blackwell and Blackmore 2003b).

The following sections of this chapter draw upon the research findings to explore three specific areas of potential tension and debate in respect of CPD in higher education. In particular, the discussion that follows demonstrates that the research findings, while supporting some of the

assertions in the literature, more manifestly serve to highlight a number of significant disparities between the theoretical analysis and the reality of practice. The research can be seen, therefore to further 'problematised' the concept of CPD in higher education, acknowledging the complexities and encouraging on-going participative debate (Clegg 2003b).

#### The CPD debates in practice: defining Continuing Professional Development

The academics who participated in this study were each asked to articulate their understanding of CPD in the context of their practice. The responses provide evidence of the problematic nature of the concept as debated in the literature and of the additional challenge caused by a range of terms being used to convey similar notions, such as: staff development, educational development, self-development, lifelong learning and critical professional learning. More starkly apparent was that many of the participants had not previously given any thought to CPD and therefore the notion was essentially alien to them. This was in part explained by some of the academics as being due to professional development being embedded as an integral element to their daily work.

I don't see it as being separate so I think ... to me its almost like saying, do you eat and drink, do you actively eat and drink, in that I don't separate it very easily from day to day activities. (Carla)

This participant furthered the food metaphor to explain how she was having difficulty in conceptualizing CPD as an individual entity:

It is like saying here's a pizza, but actually I don't want you to put the pizza together, what I want you to do is put the flour over there and the tomatoes there and the cheese there and the anchovies there ... they only want you to see that bit, the pizza is the whole not just the ingredients in piles that you can pick and choose when you want to ... I just see it as being part of my normal [daily work]. (Carla)

In the previous chapter, Beckton explored the possible implicit nature of some aspects of the academic role, particularly teaching, and the potential challenges this may have for collegiate, critical dialogue and social learning. Interestingly, the embedded and potentially hidden nature of professional learning that is expressed in this research, particularly in respect of subject specific development, appears to result in some academics perceiving CPD as being those areas of learning that lie outside their daily working practices. Thus Honor describes CPD as being '... developing skills that you don't develop through teaching or that are outside of your own subject area but they are things that you need to do, so like computing training for when you have to do administrative tasks'. Conversely, some of those interviewed described professional development as being that 'which enables practitioners or academics or teachers to fulfil their day job ... to keep themselves up to date ...' (Rebecca).

Others reflected on the complexity of the term, particularly in conceptualizing CPD within the context of working in a learning environment:

It's about environments, context, professional environment context, I think it's a very multi-layered, multi-dimensional community of learning that's available for all of us and I

think, actually, one of the things that working at the Uni does give you access to is that learning environment. (Colin)

When asked about whether, at the level of the institution, there was an agreed understanding of what was meant by CPD for academics, the key informants interviewed all felt that while there was implicit agreement about the benefits of CPD, it would not be possible to identify an agreed, recorded definition for the concept across the institution.

Many academics also articulated their awareness and experiences of the tensions caused by the disparity in perceived status and reward afforded to activities related to teaching and research (Barnett 2005c; Clegg 2003b; Trigwell and Shale 2004). Ratana, who describes the focus and enjoyment in her work as being ‘around the teaching of students’ expresses some frustration as she perceives that:

As far as professional development within my subject is concerned, the way it is seen by my department is, it’s all about your PhD specialism, your research activity, your research group activity, your publication record, that is what they’re all about, and really not a lot of commitment to the pedagogy principle, I don’t think. (Ratana)

The challenge of dual professionalism was raised by many of the academic participants, with some individuals describing ways in which they work to ‘integrate two professional disciplines, being for example a professional teacher and a professional manager’ (Carla) and endeavouring to ‘keep myself up to date with ... teaching and learning techniques but also with my subject and developments in practice’ (Catriona). The findings of the research data in this respect can be seen to contradict some of the theoretical assertions discussed earlier. As shown, some academics describe the challenges of pursuing pedagogically-related development, yet the literature suggests that institutionally CPD centres on knowledge and skills related to teaching and learning (Clegg 2003b), with further support for teaching and learning related CPD offered by the Professional Standards Framework (HEA 2006) and recognition of professional status through fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

It is apparent that for many staff, as discussed by Allan et al. (2003), it is the developmental needs related to their subject and academic discipline that are most often prioritized. This may be partly due to the complex, dynamic and pressured academic role and personal career development pathways, rather than representing any intentional avoidance of other aspects of the academic role or indeed institution-wide priorities. When interviewed, Peter explained that:

The bulk of my work is teaching ... I have a fair dollop of administration, I am programme leader ... and sit on various other committees ... and then research comes at the end of it all. (Peter)

When asked about his CPD activities, however, Peter was very clear that he considered himself to be ‘CPD active’, explaining this was

Because I'm learning new things all the time, I'm learning new statistical techniques, I'm learning new experimental techniques, I'm learning how to write, I'm learning how to take a subject area and pick out the bits that are going to lead to good publications ... the bits that are going to move the theory of the discipline forward. (Peter)

Thus from this example, while Peter is embedded in the whole range of academic responsibilities, professional development can be seen to have been firmly focused on his discipline. An appreciation of these tensions was also evident from the key informants interviewed, one of whom explained that university lecturers perceive themselves principally as experts in their subject area and that this perception is reinforced by the students that they work with. With what she called a 'wariness' of 'cultivating the idea that people have a second professional identity as a teacher of their subject', one key informant stated that she appealed to colleagues as 'teachers of history, or teachers of forensic science', in order to attempt to recognize the whole of the academic role and emphasize that teaching and learning of subjects is one element of CPD activity for academic staff.

#### The CPD debates in practice: approaches to Continuing Professional Development

The significance of subject-related CPD is also apparent when academics describe the different activities which they perceive as contributing to their professional development. Most commonly these include formalized education and training opportunities, alongside informal learning. Within this, however, the interviews provide evidence of the truth of Knight's (2006) iceberg metaphor in that many of the professional disciplinary scholarship activities described represent informal development and learning, which is not always identified by individuals or institutions in terms of CPD.

It doesn't really stop, you know, whether you are talking about individual students which everybody does, you know, we've got a problem here or this is great or whatever or you are talking about methodology, you think, am I talking about it or shall we have a meeting about it, you just do it. (Amanda)

It is also apparent from the data that many academics place great importance on learning and development through networking. Most commonly this is with colleagues based in other institutions nationally and internationally but, importantly, working in similar subject specialisms. Many interviewees expressed engagement in learning communities 'where the community practises the scholastic processes of conversation, involvement and engagement as modes of revealing knowledge' (Gibbs et al. 2004).

I think that the learning takes place across a broad community which might be local, regional, national or international, so although we locate ourselves in institutions, I think if we swear allegiance to the institution too much, it will stop us all from learning and the real learning takes place when you get to the outside. (Colin)

When talking about approaches to CPD, the academics interviewed raised concern about it being one of many demands on their time, within an overall environment of 'ever increasing external demands placed upon institutions and individuals' (Cullingford 2002: 223). The National Student Survey ([www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/nss)), which is explored further by Hagyard in Chapter 9, is

one example of such demands. In her interview, Elizabeth describes the ‘backlash’ from this survey with unexpected management directives about what was to be taught, leading to ‘a real issue of quality of life’ for academics. Similarly Annie, referring to how the National Student Survey may influence academics’ responses to CPD, states that:

I think it is a stick, rather than a carrot. I don’t know, academics certainly in HE don’t respond well to sticks. (Annie)

As has been shown, academics are working with changing national policy directives and increasing and shifting expectations are being made both on institutions and individuals (Cullingford 2002; D’Andrea and Gosling 2005). Potentially also, in response to some of these drivers, academics are experiencing change in organizational structures which impact upon practice. These changes, though, are arguably mitigated by continuity, for example, the spread of quality assurance practices may influence professional identity, but does not determine it (Knight 2002).

The CPD debates in practice: policy implementation

The relationship between national and institutional policy implementation, compounded by potential tensions related to the interface or ‘duality’ (Giddens 1981) between structure and agency, emerged as a further theme from the research.

For example it was particularly notable that all interviewees – including key informants – agreed that there was no knowledge of an explicit, institution-wide concept, definition or philosophy with regard to CPD for its academics. For example, one key informant stated that ‘there is a lot of very good practise that goes on, I just don’t think it’s agreed and standardized and embedded in processes, I think it is rooted in the culture.’ Additionally when key informants were asked to identify where responsibility for CPD implementation was placed within the structure of the organization, it was apparent that the complexity of the concept is mirrored in the multifaceted nature of how it is supported in practice. Thus a range of central departments, along with the academic subject areas and the individual academics themselves, are all perceived as having some element of responsibility in this respect.

Earlier in this chapter the national context for CPD in academia was seen to have been set, at least in part, through the Higher Education Academy, by means of national professional standards and recognition through fellowship of the Academy. While the influence of these developments within the academic community is seen as ‘a step in the right direction’ (Annie), this research shows it to be severely limited. Of the 16 academics interviewed, four (25 per cent) were currently registered as Fellows of the HEA. While it should be acknowledged that some of the newer academics were working towards registration, many still perceived it as having little value or importance. When asked for views on the standards, Rhys said ‘I don’t know what the national standards are ... can you give me a sort of rough idea?’. Similarly Pascal, who had several years’ teaching experience and a post-graduate certificate in education, was unaware that this may entitle him to apply for fellowship of the Academy.

It could be expected that the Academy’s subject-centres network would have considerably influence on the practice and development needs of academics: this would follow from their



propensity to focus professional development on discipline-related learning and the significance attributed to external networking with like-minded colleagues. However, this was found not to be the case. Few of those interviewed demonstrated any awareness of the subject centres, with those who were aware having little direct involvement:

There is a subject centre for (my subject) and to be honest with you, I've never really heard anybody talk about it. (Chantrea)

There is one, yes, but I think it's quite broad and our area is specific. (Catriona)

I have looked at it, but not found it to be desperately useful which I was a bit disappointed with, I have to confess. (Peter)

The research therefore adds weight to the view that the connection between policy statement or intention on the one hand, and implementation through conception at institutional and individual level on the other, is at best uncertain and at worst nonexistent.

## Conclusion

The tensions and debates raised through the literature, along with the additional and sometimes contrasting perspectives from academics analysed through this research, may have significant implications for academics' CPD in general and, more particularly, for the implementation of the National Professional Standards for Teaching in Higher Education. It can be seen that the notion of CPD is surrounded by a range of tensions and complexities that result in the concept being fluid, subjective and potentially attributed with a number of contestable meanings. Blackwell and Blackmore (2003b: 3) propose that not only is there 'no settled meaning', but that there is unlikely ever to be one. The participants in this research demonstrate that not only is there confusion over the meaning of CPD, but for many academics CPD as a concept is absent from their conscious thinking. As Clegg (2003) suggests, there is an argument that problematizing the concept of CPD enables engagement in collegiate critique with regard to developing clarity of understanding; at the very least re-examining at individual and institutional levels how the term is conceptualized.

The voices of the academics in this research illustrate the rich and wide-ranging views on activities that enhance professional development. It is noticeable, however, that frequently academics do not perceive these activities as being developmental. Thus, the advancement of knowledge through social communication processes must not be jeopardized by institutional bureaucracy (Zuber-Skerritt 1992), as the quality of workplace environments can be seen as the central means of creating 'cultures of concern' and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning (Knight 2006). Indeed, the opportunity to develop CPD frameworks and policies that become accredited to the HEA can be seen as an opportunity to harness institutional, disciplinary and individual autonomy, as this facilitates the development of structures that recognize and value the whole range of academic professional development, being inclusive of all aspects of the academic role. Within this there needs to be clarity about whose needs are being met and who is responsible for CPD, with the connection between institutional processes and individual needs and aspirations

being made explicit. In the following chapter Watling provides a useful example of developmental activity that raises the importance of acknowledging the diverse needs of all staff, as she discusses engagement with new technologies.

The research that has been reported through this chapter has considered how changes and continuities in contemporary higher education influence how academics perceive and respond to CPD. Through the perspective of academics themselves, a range of tensions and debates have been reinforced and illustrated. Perhaps Carla's pizza metaphor provides an apt conclusion here, in that there are many different 'recipes', many different 'flavours' being created in a complex and changing environment, so the pizzas that are CPD in higher education should rightly be subjected to analysis, debate and 'tasting' across academic cultures and institutional contexts.

Table 6.1 – Key demographics of academic research participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Subject area	Is required to comply with a subject related professional CPD framework	Contractual tenure	Contracted working hours	Length of experience as an academic
Adam	M	Applied	No	Temporary	Hourly paid	6-10 years
Amanda	F	Applied	No	Fixed Term	Fractional	21 years +
Annie	F	Applied	No	Permanent	Full time	21 years +
Carla	F	Applied	Yes	Permanent	Full time	1-5 years
Catriona	F	Applied	No	Permanent	Full time	11-15 years
Chantrea	F	Pure	No	Temporary	Hourly paid	Under 1 year
Colin	M	Applied	No	Permanent	Part time	6-10 years
Elizabeth	F	Pure	No	Fixed Term	Full time	1-5 years
Honor	F	Applied	No	Fixed Term	Full time	1-5 years
Jameel	M	Applied	No	Permanent	Full time	1-5 years
Mike	M	Applied	No	Fixed Term	Hourly paid	1-5 years
Pascal	M	Applied	Yes	Permanent	Full time	6-10 years
Peter	M	Pure	No	Permanent	Full time	11-15 years
Ratana	F	Applied	No	Permanent	Full time	16-20 years
Rebecca	F	Applied	Yes	Permanent	Full time	6-10 years
Rhys	M	Applied	No	Permanent	Full time	Under 1 year